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Conference Report

Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India

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India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

Organised by

Indian Institute of Dalit Studies

&

International Development Research Centre



Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction to the Document | |
| 1.1 Perspective on Women's Rights and Citizenship | 4 |
| 1.2 Women Rights and Citizenship'- Differentiated Universalism' | 5 |
| 1.3 Rationale for the Focus on Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India | 6 |
| 2. Feminist Discourse and Dalit Women's Question | 8 |
| 3. Life through Dalit Women's Writings | 9 |
| 3.1 Dalit women's writings and the question of education | 10 |
| 3.2 Life Narrative through Dalit Women's writings | 10 |
| 3.3 Dalit women's writings and Sexual exploitation: | 10 |
| 3.4 Dalit women's writings and Movements | 11 |
| 3.5 Dalit Women's writings and Child's Eye | 11 |
| 3.6 Dalit Women's writings and issue of Food and Pollution | 11 |
| 4. Human Poverty Gender and Caste Discrimination | 13 |
| 5. Emerging Issues from Deliberation at the Conference | 16 |
| Annexure | 19 |

Introduction to the Document

This report is a synthesis of the presentations and discussions at the conference 'Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India'. The conference was held at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi on 19th of March, 2010; after one year of our work on the issue of 'Gender and Caste' funded by International Development Research Centre. The conference focused primarily on multiple levels of deprivation arising from interface of gender and caste, through literature available on the feminist discourse, questions of Dalit women, official data sets in regard to this area and its impact on access to Dalit women rights and citizenship in India.

The conference was inaugurated by Dr. C.P. Joshi, Minister of Rural Development. The conference provided a forum for knowledge-sharing between policy-makers, practitioners and academics on the challenges faced by Dalit women and opportunity of influencing pro-active policies, strategies and legislation for enhancing Dalit women's right and entitlement. The participants provided feedback on the feminist discourse and Dalit women's question, Dalit women's articulation of self, the current socio-economic and political status and emerging issues for further inquiry and made further contribution to the recommendations on Dalit women rights and citizenship in India.

The conference report was compiled by seven researchers from Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (Saswatee Rath, Gobind Pal, L. David Lal, Martin Kamodang, Firdaus Fatima Rizvi, Gowhar Yaqoob, Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal). They took notes during the conference while information gathered was supplemented by notes from the main speakers as well as panelists.

The body of the report is a synthesis of the conference and is divided into four main sections on the feminist discourse and Dalit women's question, Dalit women's articulation of self, the current socio-economic and political status and emerging issues of Dalit women rights and citizenship for further inquiry. In each section, lessons and recommendations from the panellists, participants are identified (Please see annexure for the names and the details of the panelist and speakers).

Themes covered in the Conference:

- ❖ Perspective on Women's Rights and Citizenship
- ❖ Theoretical writings on issues of Gender, Race and Slavery
- ❖ The Indian feminist discourse and Dalit women's question and the issue of Gender interfaces with Caste.
- ❖ The emergence of new Dalit women movement rooted in Ambedkar's views.
- ❖ Empirical evidence on human poverty, gender and caste discrimination from autographical writings of Dalit women.
- ❖ The empirical evidence on Human Poverty, gender and violence, caste discrimination from official sources and primary studies.
- ❖ Evidence based perspective on issues of Dalit women rights and citizenship

1.1 Perspective on Women's Rights and Citizenship:

Speaker – Dr. Navsharan Singh

IDRC's Women's Right and Citizenship (WRC-IDRC) share the perspective of IDS on caste, and reiterated that caste is not a tradition written down on stone, but it is constructed in history, built in history, and WRC also believes that it can be changed in the contemporary history through people's struggles. WRC programme is anchored on addressing various forms of gender inequalities, and iniquities; why they continue to persist despite notable gain, why women are prevented from realising rights and full citizenship as partners in development and citizens, where and how implementation of formal gains (for instance in international law) have fallen short. The program on the discussion of rights anchors on the concept of citizenship where citizenship is understood as a status, an identity, a practice and a process.

Citizenship is understood as carrying the conception of rights which are shaped through actual struggle informed by people's own understanding of what they are justly entitled to. Building inclusive society means citizens with equal rights, and hence the quest for looking at citizenship. Women's right and citizenship concerns with rights and that it grew out of engaging with the liberal notion of citizenship which implies set of rights and responsibility bestowed by the state on citizens. IDRC while reviewing scholarly work on citizenship had to deal with two dilemmas:

- a) Whether to make membership of nation state as the defining parameter of citizenship, which is a state centred approach where state and individual are in a relationship or
- b) Whether to look at identity derived from participation in a wide variety of associational life which connotes citizenship as society centric.

IDRC is guided by an understanding that linking citizenship to a membership in a national state differentiates citizenship as a form of membership from all other forms of identity and belongings that individuals have. More importantly, it helps to anchor the claim for equal right in specific institutions and to identify the duty bearers responsible for meeting these claims because it is addressed to someone. They look at citizenship in a vertical relationship between state and individual but at the same time realising that situation may arise where state proves to be consistently un-responsive to the needs of citizens. It is through collective action of citizens, which is horizontal relationship between citizens and among citizens, particularly those citizens whose rights have been marginalised and who have been disenfranchised by the prevailing order that a more democratised vertical relationship can be established or restored. In a nut shell, there is a relationship of individual with the state; a vertical relationship and to realise that vertical relationship, exploration of horizontal relationship becomes important. While much of the literature on citizenship has been on the context of the studies of political rights and governance with the western politics and philosophy including the feminist critics of citizenships and rights which are available, there is now a growing body of literature from the sociological point of view and historical perspective that looks at the meaning and practice of citizenship specially in post-colonial context.

IDRC takes up a sociological approach to citizenship focusing on its implication for distribution of rights, resources and recognition. Like many feminist and others who are looking at citizenship in the context of gender rights, it encounters the dilemma from gender perspective. That is why citizenship is a way of defining personhood which link rights to agency. The history of citizenship is a history of denial of rights and therefore agency to specific category of people which it has been seen is true for every society and this continues to the present. IDRC is of the view that women across the world have found it difficult to be entitled citizens, to access equal rights and exercise agency as free citizens.

1.2 Women Rights and Citizenship'- Differentiated Universalism'

The basis of the idea that irrespective of one's race, class, caste and gender, a person is entitled to same rights and treatment is the liberal conception of universal rights. Liberalism in this sense does present us with the potential of emancipation because it claims that one's identity and entitlement is not listed to ascribed relations. However, this universalistic promise of liberalism while few struggles for equal rights, has also been the reason for limiting rights to formal guarantees only. And this is because liberalism does not recognise the difference and inequalities between people arising from these very differences i.e. caste, ethnicity or class. In liberal framework, rights are conferred on individuals conceived of as human subject who does not have a gender, class, caste or ethnicity and is therefore not differentiated in any way in terms of resources and powers as real people. Legal persons who are conferred on the basis of this human code, the law is then seen to be a neutral instrument which confines rights based on this essence. The citizen thus created, who is the bearer of rights and who can act politically to secure more entitlements is considered to be neutral, sexless, and classless without ethnicity in this discourse. Feminist, caste and race activists have challenged this dominant universal conception of citizenship. They have shown that the right standards while seemingly neutral within the liberal discourse, who does not have gender, class, ethnicity or race, are in reality standards built with elite males in a given society as a norm. This is manifested in the substance of law and policies and in interpretation and implementation. Several examples of it in the literature will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Thus, as rightly observed by feminists that entitling all citizens to the same rights does not necessarily promote equitable outcomes and formal rights, do not ensure substantive equality over agency. But at the same time despite this reservation, gender rights movements actually come closer to the liberal tradition when they speak out for equality and equal rights. The meaning and practice of citizenship and equal rights hold out the promise of releasing the citizen subject from the bondage of ascribed social relations; from having made claims based on norm charity benevolent or patronage into a relationship with the neutral arbitral, the state. For women, this means that their identities are as persons and not into relationship to a man as a mother, sister, daughter or a wife. But the fulfillment of these promises undermined by the legacy once again of state-society relationship in our post-colonial formations where customary laws and practices exist side by side with civil law and more binding and authoritative, in regulating gender and social relations within the family and community. Similarly even within the troubled state-society relationship, which gender activist find, there are certain groups within a society which are consigned to the status of lesser citizens or of non citizens who as human beings are not recognised and whose full personhood is denied through practices which are rooted in hegemonic cultural definitions.

Women's rights and citizenship program of IDRC through its various research projects globally, that is, within South Asian countries and also in many other parts of the world, is empirically looking at some of these questions. At IDRC, while the organisation is working on women's rights, within women's right, the rights of the most marginalised, the ethnic marginalised communities like the Dalits has not been explored to the extend and we feel that a huge gap exists in knowledge, which one is hoping to fill through this initiative which has begun. Also to see in reality, how the meaning of rights and citizenship play out in practice. The research under discussion addresses the problems and hope that it fills the empirical void. As the debates on theoretical citizenship are happening; who is to be included and who to be excluded; the next step would be an empirical research to explore the meanings and experiences of citizenship from Dalit women perspectives.

It was concluded that WRC is looking forward to expand by taking forward this work and to identify what needs to be explored and addressed, to make rights and citizenship questions real lived questions.

1.3 Rationale for the Focus on Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India: Dr. Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal

The conference was held almost thirteen months later since January 2009 at commencing the project on 'Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship' in India. The rationale behind choosing 'Dalit women rights and citizenship' is to understand the devolving feminist discourse and emerging multiple voices in India. Since the literature on gender and feminist discourse have thrown considerable insight into the problems of Indian women, which has helped in development of a strong movement of women in India. Rich literature along with several civil society movements has influenced government policies for educational and economic empowerment of women and equal participation in governance. However, these writings do not represent a single voice and that Indian feminist discourse is marked with multiple strands. Although these strands share some commonality in the aspect problems of women, there are visible differences on a number of other aspects.

The writers who write about problems of Dalit women argue that the mainstream Indian feminist discourse does not address all aspects of Dalit women rights and citizenship, except a few. The basis of this argument is that, low caste women, particularly untouchables not only suffer gender discrimination and economic deprivation but also suffer from discrimination in related to culture, caste, and untouchability. These multiple layers pointed out results in denial of economic, social, cultural and political rights. -This view asserts that Indian feminist discourse is selective and its focus is universalistic in nature and does not cover the aspects of caste or inter-space of gender within which the Dalit feminist activism emerged. The purpose of the work is thus to understand this issue. There is very limited information on the experience of Dalit women as a woman, a Dalit and as a poor woman. Although these constitute a sizeable proportion of women's population in India; it is in this respect of negligence of Dalit women problems that Indian Institute of Dalit Studies and International Development Research Centre came together and developed a program on Dalit women discourses. The outcome of this project is 'Report on Dalit Women Rights and Citizenship in India' with its two broad objectives.

The first is to develop an understanding of Dalit women in India and another is to evolve a perspective on their rights and citizenship. The feminist discourse in the west and Indian feminist discourse have been reviewed to understand the address of Dalit women questions. The other broad objective is to understand the evolving Dalit feminist discourse from where the new Dalit women movement emerged and to get insights into Dalit women problems through empirical evidence. This empirical evidence is supported by autobiographical writings of Dalit women, official data and primary studies that IIDS and All India Dalit Mahela Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM) has done.

A brief outline of the report is the review of theoretical writings on issues of gender in general and draws a parallel with the issue of race and slavery. This section, also discusses the Indian feminist discourse and Dalit women's question, and reveals the issues of interface between gender and caste. It further discusses the emergence of new Dalit women movement which is rooted in Ambedkar's views. The second section presents empirical evidences on human poverty and gender and caste discrimination derived from autographical writings of Dalit women. The third section covers empirical evidence on human poverty, gender and violence and caste discrimination. These are supported by evidences from official sources and primary studies carried out by IIDS and AIDMAM. The fourth section is a summary of the insights from theoretical discourse on Dalit women, where human poverty, gender and caste discrimination is highlighted. The fifth section presents synthesis of Dalit women rights and citizenship in the background of 'differentiated universalism', a term coined by Lister in 1997. It is this 'differentiated universalism' that helps in recognising differences in the problems of women with different social belongings and enriching the feminist discourse to make it more inclusive. This section also indicates the gap in understanding the problem of Dalit women in theoretical, economic and social situation of Dalit women.

The report concludes by indicating issues for further studies:

- (a) evidence based understanding the Dalit women problem,
- (b) evidence based development of gender policy for Dalit women and,
- (c) evidence based interventions by the government and civil society organisations.

Chair person's Remarks: Prof. Vimal Thorat

Prof. Vimal Thorat remarked that the seminar addresses issues of excluded groups. Since the issue was not being addressed in women's freedom movement, 80 million Dalit women wanted to voice for which had been suppressed. Dalit women face multiple exploitation due to the caste hierarchy. Both women's movement and Dalit movement did not take into consideration the issues of Dalit women. Dalit women are suppressed and forced into prostitution on the name of law. The educated among Dalit women who are a part of mainstream women movement have brought to the fore issues of Dalit women. Earlier, the leaders of women's movement dealt with women issues in general and would not address women involved in manual scavenging and devadasi; so to say, not breaking the sisterhood in mainstream women movement. Babashaheb Ambedkar gave Dalit women a platform through 'All India Depressed Class Women Conference' in 1940. In 1995, Dalit women formed 'National Federation of Dalit women' to deal with the issues of livelihood, health,

employment, discrimination, untouchability and violence. It is now that in some spheres Dalit women have started demanding their rights as citizens of India.

2. Feminist Discourse and Dalit Women's Question

Speaker: Dr. Sukhadeo Thorat

Three broad lines sketched to frame the discourse. First is to look through the theoretical aspects, followed by actual reality (autobiography, official data, i.e., empirical study) and the emerging issues. It is imperative to encompass gender and feminist discourses; including American/ European Perspectives and African Feminist discourse. Having laid out the backdrop in International perspectives, the Indian context can be read through different phases: Women during the colonial period, pre-Ambedker, Ambedker era, post-Ambedker and (Dalit Feminism). This periodic study is significant to chart out the history of Feminism in general and Dalit feminism in particular. One can certainly trace some common threads in the Discourses on Feminism and questions of women, that is, Denial and Patriarchy. The American feminist discourse was precisely grounded on the binary of gender and non-gender discrimination. However the Indian story of Feminist Discourse can be seen during the Women Movement during colonial period. Issues concerning women were confined to upper caste Hindu families only where the questions of exploitation and discrimination did not figure. This certainly was mobilized to address larger issues of women of all strata. Phule, while addressing untouchable women discrimination and reforms clubbed it with Hindu families' reformation in general. This was to serve the purpose of reformation both of the Hindu families in general and precisely Dalit women. Ambedker engaged with the question of Women Movement from 1920 to 1942. Through All India Federation of Depressed Classes, Ambedker started mobilizing and organizing the Dalit Women. After 1970, Ambedker re-visited the issues of Women Movement (Dalit Women) alongside the mainstream Ambedker Movement. Here it becomes significant to address and understand Dalit Women's problems by referring to Ambedker which is where one can appropriate the gender-caste Interface. The mid 1980s saw rise of Dalit activism. In the fore front were well educated Dalits which was the backbone of the Activist Movement. The contemporary Dalit Feminist perspectives need to look through caste, gender, economic discrimination and exploitation suffered.

Discussants: Annie D. Raja, Rebecca Holmes, Smita Patil,

The discussion was started with the Women Movement in India and traced its history through various stages. Pre Independence where the agenda was welfare later the Movement addressed issues of women Development, Empowerment and lately political participation. It came about that after 1975, the four International Conferences brought into concern contemporary issues. The general conditions of Women are no better and within the women, the state of Dalit women is dilapidated. In a survey on Infant Mortality, 90 per cent were Dalits or Tribals. This survey has revealed a condition that must be classified as the Criminal Act and needs to be addressed as Criminal Act would be in general. As of late, the general movements in India (Women are taken as a Class) certainly to keep away the political enforcement. It is here she brought in the scope to address and club the issues of discrimination and caste-gender interface into the general Indian Women's Movement.

While theorizing the question of patriarchy; it was conceptualized that Patriarchy into the Feminist Discourse *vis a vis* Marxist Discourse since patriarchy exists in absence of property as well. The Marxist Discourse sees how exploitation of house-hold labor within the working class benefits the capitalists; whereas question of women is not just the exploitation of labour. Dalit men who are unemployed, demand both survival and serving from their women. Adding to it Ambedker did not look at these perspectives but observed that legal constitutional safeguards were insufficient. Thus he recommended the Customary Bill.

In a contrast between Feminist practice in the west and in Indian context, it was remarked that in the West the gender roles needed to re-define in order to address the middle class household difficulty since the household work needed to be shared between man and woman due to in-affordability of domestic servant. Whereas in India this was never an issue that the feminists needed to address since such a condition was not a concern, to afford to keep a domestic helper. Referring to the custodial rapes not just power domination, it was remarked that such incidents often involve caste hierarchies; as an example she cited the custodial rape case in Uttar Pradesh.

Also the frameworks of Feminist Discourse in the International Perspectives was discussed. As practical examples on Feminist discourses, it was said that differences across time and space needs to be highlighted, to contextualize gender-based discrimination and economic inequality. Discussing the shortcomings of Western Feminist Discourse, it was remarked that the mainstream discourse on Feminism in the West was precisely white European women which simply neglected middle class, ethnic and racial differences. Also the Discourse lacked the perspective of Interface. Later the lack was addressed by African/ American scholars who criticized the narrow aspects and highlighted political rights, equal pay and similar other issues. By 1970, 'Economic Equity' promoting development and realizing women to be the poorest of the poor came to for front. In the Forum for Global Feminist Discourse, Diversity was recognized to be an important and significant parameter in all Feminist Discourses.

Observation and remarks on the session brought into focus many issues as the critique of the Report. Accordingly, Ambedker Democratic Rights need to be re-visited. Since women have a right to their bodies, the need is to place it as an argument. Also Socialist-Marxist perspective needs to be included into the discourse. The debate of citizenship bearing complexities hence the theoretical and political models relating to citizenship need to be explored through all complexities.

3. Life Through Dalit Women's Writings

Speaker: Dr. Wandana Sonalkar

The emergence of Dalit women organisations in the 1990's and publication of number of translations of Dalit women writings into English has set the foundation for theoretical and empirical Dalit feminist discourse. Dalit women's writing, not only report the double and multiple subjugation of Dalit women in their day-to-day life but also provide raw empirical data. There are varieties of approaches that these writings reflect which the speaker intends to address in her presentation.

It was pointed on Prof. Guru's remark on Dalit women's writings, where he says, Dalit testimonies can be interpreted as powerful moral medium to protest against the adversaries, both from within and outside. Dalit women testimonies could be seen as the political initiative to engage with Dalit patriarchy and social patriarchy. Dalit women's personal narratives are a kind of protest against the exploitation by state on the one hand and market on the other. According to the speaker, Prof. Guru and Pandian state that autobiographical writings of Dalit women generate a certain collective consciousness rather than describing her individual sufferings. This is the underlining feature of their writings from most of the languages. Babythai Kamble, *Marathi* Dalit women writer, believed to be scripted the first Dalit Autobiography. Kamble, while addressing the Dalit community attempts to remind the messages of Baba Saheb Ambedkar delivered for the oppressed sections of the society. The issues of poverty, deprivation and humiliation are central point of discussion, sometimes described in an agonising fashion. Dalit autobiography reveals the reality of 'negative inclusion'. Dalits are included in the caste structure to do the menial subservient forms of work such as carrying the dead animal, manual scavenging etc. These negative rights are an extreme form of humiliation perpetuated on Dalits. The writing captures acute form of problems faced by Dalits on the grounds of their daily need, for example, Dalits are forced to eat inedible cactus. While differentiating the writings of Dalit men and women, speaker stresses that, Dalit women writings are much more conscious about collective experiences. Babythai Kamble, Shantabhai Kamble and also Urmila Pawar do talk about a journey of life from a poor background struggling for better life within Dalit community and caste communities.

3.1 Dalit women's writings and the question of education:

Education was viewed as a way of liberation from social oppression that they had suffered through ages. Invariably all the Dalit women's writings raised this issue to improve their folk, moreover their writings particularly focused on the emancipatory nature of education. However, it also does mention various hurdles at all the stages of gaining education and even the post-education phase. Kumudh Pawde, a Sanskrit teacher in a college at Maharashtra before getting this job faced all kinds of discrimination, it was only after marrying a non-Dalit that she managed to find a job. With the Dalit surname she was not accepted to teach and was ridiculed. Dalit Women view education much more nuanced than Dalit politician or even Dalit men's autobiographical writings.

3.2 Life Narrative through Dalit Women's writings:

There is lot of description about the nature of work Dalits perform in the villages, particularly Dalit women who are engaged in the hard labour. Along side, details about the caste structure of the village and description of various Dalit castes are also narrated in detail. The resources present in the villages are kept away from the Dalit community, for example, Dalits are not allowed to fill water from the common well is one of the omnipresent practice in Indian villages.

3.3 Dalit women's writings and Sexual exploitation:

Women agricultural labourers working in the fields of upper caste are often victimised sexually. . Different writings have depicted the everyday fear of Dalit women and their vulnerability. Upper caste men remind Dalit women of their inferiority through the use of

their body. The men from Dalit community are not in the position to ensure protection of their own women folk rather they ask the victims to be silent so as to avoid any further wrath of upper caste feudal men. In *Bama's* testimonial detail narration, their helplessness has been dealt. The 'work' and 'sexual harassment' travel constantly in Dalit women's writings. While Dalit women writers take pride in their work. *Veeramma*- a Dalit mid-wife takes pride in handling the complex deliveries. In opposition to the life in the city, Dalit women take pride in working at agricultural fields under the open sky. The expressions of a feeling of free are visible in their writings. While dealing with the question of sexual violence, Dalit women's writings express the highest degree and nature of sexual violence with much comfort through fictional writings than autobiographies. Fictional works provide them the liberty to express the kind of irony and tragedy, moreover, the very complex kind of caste hierarchy and the right of the upper caste man over their body. These fictional narratives are not restricted to sexual violence alone, rather these highlight the dichotomy of irrational untouchability and the physical relationship of upper caste men with Dalit women. Incidents otherwise difficult to pen down are easily gathered in these writings. Such kind of fictional literatures require exploration and wider readings.

3.4 Dalit women's writings and Movements:

Ambedkar's ideology and his movement is a prominent feature in the writings of Dalit autobiographies and writings. *Bama's* writings illustrate her experience of Christianity and its philanthropic efforts to uplift the Dalit community. There are lot of references to Ambedkar's appeal to overcome superstition and ignorance. Dalit women's writings talks about the need to get rid of superstition from their minds. They are not merely presented as being irrational but as reinforcing and reminding the Dalits at bottom of hierarchy. Superstitions are unscientific and are enforced through rituals and religious sanctions. Hindu religion generates fear in the minds of Dalits which hold them back and would not allow thinking scientifically. Urmaila Pawar notes, years after her migration into the city she visited her village and found out soon after the death of Baba Saheb Ambedkar Dalit that people have gone back to their traditional faiths. Poverty, Ignorance and Superstition are reinforced so as to tie Dalit to a miserable life. Whereas; illustrating the contemporary Dalit movements, Dalit women writings are more critical toward the Dalit men and their quest for power. Politics is a tool to emancipate and assert their identity, the Dalit women writings question the compromising and bargaining model of Dalit politics

3.5 Dalit Women's writings and Child's Eye:

These writings also do mention about the challenges of Dalit children in the caste society. Children are denied the pleasures of childhood in caste hierarchy. Dalit children did not have a play ground; they are refused to play with other caste Hindu children in the villages. While accompanying parents to the upper caste for several reasons, they are strictly warned not to touch anything. The whole idea of untouchability and caste practices rip away the innocence as children and affect their behavioural.

3.6 Dalit Women's writings and Issue of Food and Pollution:

Dalits and Poverty are synonymous to each other in almost all the writings. Poverty does not appear due to lack of access rather it is denied and caused due to exclusion. Another significant issue mentioned in Dalit women's writings is the construction of untouchability practices through food and pollution. The preparation of food and inter-dining are explicit manners of untouchability. While in school and other public spheres, the notion of purity and pollution is constantly realised.

Dalit autobiographies reproduce the marginalisation of these communities. Their experiences, expressions and expectations are explicitly depicted in their writings. Therefore it needs translation of the same.

Discussants: Dr. Vimal Thorat, Dr. Sharmila Rege

Dalit women writings do not just focus individual vulnerability rather underlines the pain, grief and misery of the entire community. Dalit women narratives have presented a detailed account of daily life, awareness about their self, social location and their social, economic and sexual susceptibility. Description of poverty and its impact on Dalit women are captured well in their writings. The wide range of issues such as gender, upper caste violence on women and religious discrimination is also to be addressed. Importantly, their writings involve the problems of larger society and particularly Dalit society.

The discussion focused on four areas:

Conceptual Issues: It was highlighted that the life narratives employed occupied central point of analysis for the situation of Dalit women rights and citizenship in the report. Traditional understanding of caste and issues of Dalit women has been dealt differently. It challenges and nullifies the traditional "Top Down" approach and has created an alternate method of "Bottom-Up" approach. The erased Dalit history and Dalit intellectuality in particular Dalit women's history is recreated through these writings. Life narratives bring back the veiled history into the mainstream. Conventional Feminists recognised the issues of Dalit women in the 1990's and called it as something 'New'. Rather they have a long history from the Ambedkarite Movement which is reclaimed through writings and reports such as this.

Life Narratives: The debate on the application of Dalit narratives as 'Raw Empiricism' and 'Radical Empiricism' has been discussed over time and again. This report does not engage into the binary of Raw and Radical Empiricism. It looks narratives as living histories. Dalit narratives are an embodied text, present in body and mind. It is purely interpretative and open to interpretations. This report exactly does that which is important. The evolution of Dalit movements occurred through these Dalit writings. Dalit narratives are 'acts of history' than 'acts of memory.' The theoretical writings on engendering citizenship like Anupama Roy and Nivedita Menon, also writings of young researchers involved in academics through their research works for example; a dissertation from Hyderabad Central University involved her personal life from childhood to university to investigate the question of theory of education in India, also blogs in internet on contemporary issues not only provide space for mobilisation but also disseminate knowledge related to Dalit women.

Inclusion and Exclusion of Texts in the Report: The selection of texts from Marathi and Tamil literature only has not been specified. It is important to include the Dalit women

narratives present in other languages such as Bengali, Telugu, Hindi etc. Apart from the writings, Dalit women issues of citizenship, development and Ambedkarism are important that need to be included. These should not only be viewed as emotional behavior or narratives rather as the source of activities. Dissatisfaction of including Veeramma's story as a Dalit narrative was shown.

Issues for Interpretation: Interpretation of Dalit Life Narrative should be located on the complexity and relationality in the report. Issues of violence on Dalit women should be related not only to the physical aspect but also the routine economic and civil violence. The issue of modernity and involvement of Dalit women is crucial for understanding. These narratives bring Dalit women as the producers of modernity and not as passive recipients or consumers of modernity.

Chairs Remarks: Dr. Surinder Jodhka

Citizenship and rights are not for equality, parity, food and shelter but recognising them as citizens, giving rights to human dignity. T.H. Marshall's essay on citizenship is very important to know as right to vote began as a simple political right later many rights were added into it, like the right to education, health provision and information etc. Once everybody is treated with equal respect, no hierarchy with which the question of citizenship is addressed. Citizenship means human being treated without contempt. In order to ensure citizenship for all, third party 'democratic state' is essential. Without an interventionist state it is difficult to imagine citizenship. We need to understand and work on the institutionalisation of citizenship which can function without state as well.

4. Human Poverty Gender and Caste Discrimination

Speaker: Dr Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal

A brief report was presented on Dalit women rights and citizenship in India jointly taken up by IIDS and IDRC, recapturing many issues discussed in the earlier sessions.. The problems through government sources on one hand and through primary studies on the other hand focusing on human poverty, gender and caste discrimination were highlighted. In the backdrop of theoretical discussion, the review of the economic and social situation of the Dalit women indeed provides an idea not only about their economic and social situation but also indicate the distinctiveness of their problem. The official data revealed the relative position of these women *vis-à-vis* rest of the women. Most of the SC women lack access to income earning assets and depend mainly on wage labour. In early 2000, only 21 per cent of SC women were cultivators as compared to 45 per cent of non-SC/ST women indicating that access to agricultural land is not equal to all women. As a result, about half of SC workers worked as agricultural wage labour in rural areas as compared to 17 per cent for non-SC/ST. Besides, a large number of SC women are engaged in so-called 'unclean' and 'polluting' occupations such as scavenging.

In 2001, the literacy rate among SC females in rural areas was 41 per cent respectively; as compared to 58 per cent for non-SC/ST women. Low education reduces employability and result in high unemployment rate. The unemployment based on current daily status in

2004/5 was 12.36 per cent for SC, compared with the average of non-SC/ST women - being 9.50 per cent..

High incidence of wage labour with low earnings, low educational attainment and high unemployment result in high degree of deprivation and poverty among SC women. As per 2005/6 NFHS survey, about 58.3 per cent of SC women suffered from anaemia compared to 51.3 per cent among non - SC/ST women. Malnutrition of the mother impacts the health outcomes of children. About 21 per cent of SC children under 4 years of age suffered from malnutrition-compared with 13.80 per cent of other children respectively. Nearly 72 per cent of children from SC suffer from anaemia, compared to 63.8 per cent among other. High level of malnutrition among the SC results in high morbidity and mortality. In 2005-06, IMR was 66.4 for SC - much higher compared to 49 for other respectively. High infant/children mortality levels in SC population indicate low infant survival.

This evidence indicates that there are similarities and differences in the problems faced by women belonging to the Dalit social groups and rest of the women. Like all women, these women also suffer from subordination due to patriarchy experienced within the family, at the place of work, and in society. Like their poor counter-parts from other female groups, they also suffer from lack of access to income earning assets, education and resultant high poverty. However, Dalit women differ from rest of the women in so far as their performance with regard to human development indicators is lower as compared to their counter-parts from rest of the women and that the causes of more deprivation of these women lies in social exclusion. The women belonging to social grouping of low caste suffer from social exclusion and discrimination due to their cultural identity, which rest of the women do not. It is this “exclusion –induced deprivation” which differentiates excluded women from rest of the women. Low caste women faced denial of equal rights in the past, which continue in the present in some spheres, if not all. They are victims of social and religious practices such as *Devdasi* resulting in sexual exploitation on the name of religion.

Discussants: Dr. Ramya Sumbramanian, Dr. Prasad and Paul Diwakar from NCDHR, Prof Saraswati Raju

Chair: Arundhuti Roy

The struggles involved in collecting the segregated data were focused and supposed to be still a major issue for an average kind of databases. It needs to be specified what the problem is and why there is a gap in obtaining data. She finally insisted on formulating strategies for the government.

Three different aspects of discrimination and violence were focused on. First aspect was on the nature of discrimination: why some have lesser access to land, education, health etc. Second aspect was atrocities and third was on rights. Everybody should have a right to land, education etc but whenever a Dalit raises a voice for right there is violence. Nearly 10 per cent of atrocities are related to land, 40 per cent in political perspective, 5 per cent in health and 3 per cent in hunger and PDS. The nature of abuse is related to nature of production and that the nature of discrimination is different for males and females. Why only women

fetch water, why Dalit men don't want to confront discrimination, why only girl child is sent to fetch the key. It is the Dalit men who push women into this kind of discrimination. In the criminal justice system, there is no segregated data on Dalit women cases and the data on nature of atrocities they are facing. There is no quantification of data on discrimination and abuses and the trauma that Dalit women are facing specially the rural Dalit women. The need is to link the discrimination with statistical and economic data.

How can we draw a line what Dalit women are doing? In development sector data and economic and social dimensions are so linked up with caste and gender. As we move back to the older analysis there is nothing different; except general talks on gender violence. But no action is taken and it is still difficult to respond to within the bracket of inclusive growth. How are we addressing the issues of children learning because still the division remains? UNICEF wants young people and writers to address these issues and capture the experiences how services are provided. How they find the institutional deliveries to Dalit women and men. How these services treat them and construct them. We need perhaps more reasoning for this study presented. Are there services that allow sanitation, water, education, services for care etc. The service part is to be taken as focused in the study; have uniform type of care and services, not only just basic human rights etc. One should get to know the behaviour of service providers, the front line workers, and their attitudes. It is important to go beyond this, in fact reframe what we are asking for, participation, not only access when it does not come for! IIDS was applauded to bring these forward with their studies and the government policies.

What we see through data at large is marginalisation till Dalit group. Are we looking at one set of women, or marginal women or Dalit women or more general women as whole? Talking about patriarchy if it is greater patriarchy, soft or hard, as it differs through different regions known as regional patriarchy. How can we match the theoretical debate with this data? Doing the state-wise analysis, if we are looking at SC, then they are not in all the states. The differentiation in different parts of the country and differentiation within the community is to be seen. Can we look into the data so that dynamism can come into it? There must be changes across time and age-groups, could look into the contemporary situation and do see some mobility like 40-55, 25-40 age-group and so on through the data. See to it that whether as an individual they are able to get the resources or not. Data should be dynamic that way. Can we make this analysis as advanced and textured? The importance of multitasking was also focused upon. Women as a full time worker are assumed to be doing no other work. Domestic productive work is not included in her activities. When they are poorest of the poor, multi-tasking is at its maximum. Should we talk of employment or livelihood? Lot of work is not seen as actual work. Some information in the data should reflect the thing in itself. An example of cross tabulation like educated dalit women with work profile etc was given and many cross tabulation was encouraged to be carried.

The passing of foreign legislation bill on education was acknowledged. NCDHR has reviewed the bill through Dalit perspective. There is a need to locate the root which shall affect SCs. It may further worsen the inequalities among classes. If Dalit women can neglect the gender, the study will deepen the whole human right discourse. Theorizing part is still not done. How academics can stand shoulder to shoulder with activists. The whole discourse of caste and patriarchy is hampering Dalit Women discourse because Dalit men are not holy

cow. If these issues remain un-addressed we cannot achieve the goal. We have to see how the political parties are hitting and how to respond.. Also how do we seek liberation from patriarchal hierarchy?

5. Emerging Issues

The session started with the importance for combining theory with empirical facts. Theory is surrounded around logical propositions or hypothesis based on reality. The purpose of the workshop was to theorize the problem of women in general and Dalit women in particular backed by empirical evidences. Descriptive studies presented with empirical evidence come from autobiographies in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. A database, both primary and secondary presented on Dalit women in terms of inequalities across gender, caste and discrimination was discussed at length. It is essential to analyse the Dalit feminist discourse and also the mainstream feminist discourse. As there exists a knowledge gap between theory and empirical realities mainstream social scientists ignore issues of patriarchy and caste inter-sectionality and about Dalit women. Dalit women activism did not come out because of this gap indeed grassroot level problem come from activism of the masses. Therefore, it is essential to combine both theory and empirical facts which would also help in articulation of policies.

Discussants: Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat, Dr. Navsharan Singh, Arundhuti Roy, Anand Kumar B., Dr. Ramya Subrahmanian, Prof. Vimal Thorat, Dr. Wandana Sonalkar

Chair: Dr. Belinda Benett

Emerging issues on Dalit women, caste, gender, rights and citizenship can take the road ahead. IDRC sponsorship was the initiative to review literature and prepare proposal on two themes. One, to produce evidence on socio-economic conditions like violence and development of Dalit women, their rights and citizenship, to link up with people active in the field through civil society organisations and social movements. Second, through state and policy makers to amplify democratic set-up of society. The biographies presented are sophisticated sociological data or qualitative data. The biographies of Dalit persons are real narratives. It is important to integrate quantitative data with qualitative evidences for building democratic society with equal citizenship rights.

Literacy and illiteracy of women is not directly related to domestic violence. When the issues of domestic violence are raised within the community, leaders see it as disagreements and belittle it with silence. It is this silence that needs to be broken. The space within Dalit movement involved two levels. One dealt with the resources not been given and second, that people were not provided opportunities. The demand for sub-quota within women Reservation Bill has emerged since inclusion was at bay over past 60 years and which is apprehended to not happen in next 100 years. Exclusion happens by default; say gender, caste and other sub-identities. This needs to be addressed and can be overcome by positive affirmative actions from state. Dalit movement is struggling on issues of citizenship and the movement which are still unsettled. There exist two village systems, two classrooms, two schools, two tumblers. A number of women's movements flourish but there is not enough space and sharing of resources accessible to Dalit women. The whole issue of unpacking issues of politics of identity of being Dalit and non-Dalit is important. The poise of Dalit identity highlights issues of exclusion. On concealing their identity equality is negotiated but

as the identity comes to fore, the issues of exclusion and discrimination become apparent. Most works on Dalit women have been on life and security and less on socio-economic issues, therefore attempt needs to be made on these.

For the last ten years, there has been debate on engendering feminist citizenship of how women have been excluded and a tokenist inclusion of Dalit women is taken. The debate has been on going on endangered citizenship. It needs to be seen how the life narratives speak about citizenship as universal and link up with interpretations of bureaucracy, service providers, state and political activism. Although quantitative data separate gender and caste discrimination; however in actuality these are inseparable. The parameters for looking at them are additive and interlocking. This would help to theorise issues of patriarchy with evidence-based citizenship. In India, there are differences between Patriarchies like Dalit Bahujan Male theorist like Alialoo glorifies Dalit patriarchy as democratic. Feminists also argue that there is no difference between Brahminical patriarchy and Dalit patriarchy at home and political space. ADIMAM opines that no patriarchy is democratic. Both of these are two ends and ADIMAM reports have brought to fore both quantitative and qualitative oral narratives of violence in Brahminical patriarchy. It is essential to weave in the generational events narratives and quantitative data.

Region-wise analysis of Dalit women issues need to be taken up. As anthropological studies involve kinship regions, it is essential to re-visit these regions on caste and Dalit rights. eg. North-eastern has different culture in comparison to north-western. Caste hierarchies reproduce different situations. Some rights are individual; whereas some are group-based. Dalit women have individual rights like right over their bodies. Lived realities are a right-based approach. Citizenship is not a vertical concept between state and citizen. Policies are implemented through targeted programmes and within these schemes the rights are diluted. It is important to expand the notion of citizenship through equality and dignity and discourse for availability of rights. Inclusive citizenship is a growing aspect. Groups historically oppressed value solidarity and include peoples lived experiences.

Differences of Dalit women rights in terms of citizenship were discussed. Feminist women discourse of Dalit women need to be addressed for the Knowledge gap between empirical and theoretical studies has to be narrowed down. In terms of building programmes on rights and citizenship, the on-going debates would not suffice but raising concerns can be translated into policies. How is citizenship embodied? Universally citizenship refers to be ascribed to one who is born in a country. It is important to open up the citizenship to empirical evidences. Experiences of citizenship will show how Dalit women are excluded. Exclusiveness is important to have inclusiveness. Access to rights like education, public health care are denied to Dalit women which are the structural ways of discrimination. The programme of exclusion can address this issue. Dalit women are struggling to citizenship in relation to others . It must be born in mind that Dalit women's horizontal experiences within household *vis-à-vis* other women need to be understood. Questions relating to individual identity versus group identity and public and private patriarchies have to be answered. Dalit women experience of exclusion along with Dalit men has to be understood. Consciousness comes when they negotiate with self and groups and ends with state ; coming down to households and communities. Policy fronts basically rest on economic reliance. Once economic reliance is given, full citizenship can be made. The approaches of providing empowerment tools to individuals through economic programmes displace the question of

poverty, deprivation and inequality from arena of public politics. These are not technical assistance but part of the public politics domain. Exclusion is not additive but they are totals. Dalit women citizenship is not only to be seen through economics, indeed it is essential if further empirical evidences can be built up. State is mutated by laws based on customs, caste and ascriptive relations. The question that emerged is whether state is seen as representative of groups or there are other ways of organising these marginalities for having democratic and inclusive citizenship?

History of Dalit women's movement was talked at length. There are multiple aspects to Dalit women's citizenship, like positions in Panchayati Raj, Dalit women's equal treatment, equal access and equal opportunity. Without discussing gender issues, the issue of caste cannot be addressed effectively. Brahminical patriarchy takes advantage of the status of Dalit women which comes through in the narrations.

Reverting back to earlier debates on European feminism, citizenship should be addressed as whole. The evidence of patriarchy can be seen through falling sex-ratio. Also 30-40 years earlier, the sex-ratio was higher among SC and ST but now the gaps are bridging up on account of two explanations: One is sanskritisation among SC where patriarchal values have been added and second, over the years SC men have improved their situation. The Impact of neo-liberal policies is to be explored. Dalit women care for themselves and their children needs to be explored in depth and coping with poverty by Dalit women.

Chair Remarks: Dr. Belinda Benett

Empirical analysis of autobiographies and official data was talked about. Caste dimension of Dalit women aggravate gender problems. There are broad gaps about socio-economic condition of Dalit women. The ultimate goal is to have an inclusive citizenship i.e. equal non-discriminatory access for which it is important to have an idea about the discriminatory practises. Studies on Dalit women in terms of economic discrimination in employment, common property resources, housing, water, education, health services, political participation are to be taken up. Empirical study has to be taken through primary evidence. Two studies are important: All India study through regional initiatives/mobilisation of NGOs and other organisations on Dalit and non-Dalit women, access to PDS and MDMS is good among Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh because of accessibility to the same. Another is at Pan-India national level Dalit women initiatives. Dalit women activism at regional and national level is to be addressed. Atrocities and violence among Dalit women also needs to be addressed. Data from primary studies will build up the theoretical discourse which can lead to inclusive policy for inclusive society.

Annexure

List of Speakers and Discussants

| Name | Designation | Organisation |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Dr.C. P. Joshi | Minister of Rural Development | Minister of Rural Development |
| Prof. Surinder S. Jodhka | Former Director, Professor | IIDS, JNU |
| Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat | Chairman, Managing Trustee | UGC, IIDS |
| Dr. Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal | Principal Research Fellow - Gender and Social Exclusion | IIDS |
| Dr. Navsharan Singh | Senior Programme Specialist | IDRC |
| Prof. Vimal Thorat | Convenor, President, Professor | AIDMAM, Dalit Lekhak Sangh, IGNOU |
| Dr. Belinda Benett | South Asia representative | Christian Aid |
| Saswatee Rath | Associate Fellow | IIDS |
| Martin Kamodang | Associate Fellow | IIDS |
| Annie D. Raja | General Secretary | National Federation of Indian Women |
| Prof. Wandana Sonalkar | Director | Women's Studies Centre, Marathwada University |
| Rebecca Holmes | Research Fellow | ODI |
| Dr. Smita Patel | Assistant Professor | School of Gender and Development studies, IGNOU |
| Dr. Gowhar Yaqoob | Fellow & Editor | IIDS |
| Ramya Subrahmanian | Social Policy Specialist | UNICEF |
| Prof. Sharmila Rege | Professor | Pune University |
| L. David Lal, | Associate Fellow | IIDS |
| Arundhati Roy Choudhury | India Development Advisor | DFID |
| Dr. SDJM Prasad | General Secretary | NCDHR |
| Paul Diwakar, | Convenor | DA-3, NCDHR |
| Prof. Saraswati Raju | Professor | CSR D, JNU |
| Dr. Firdaus Fatima Rizvi | Fellow | IIDS |
| Anand Kumar B | Country Head | Christian Aid |
| Dr. Gobinda C. Pal, | Fellow | IIDS |

Feminist Discourse and Dalit Women's Question

Questions and Comments

Chair

Apart from the ideological positions and debates the need is to look at the practices as well.

Audience

1. How has mainstream Dalit Men's Movement taken the question of women?
2. Can upper caste women deal with the question of Dalit women?
3. The relevance and direct reference is made between African Black and Dalit Women's rights, can it be termed as 'Womanism' in general?
4. There is a case to say that the building blocks of 'Brahmanical Patriarchy' came from Dr. Ambedker's writings?

Looking Forward

The mainstream Feminist Discourse needs to encompass specific Diversities. These can then be translated into National Policies and Agendas to ensure the implementations and practices.

Life through Dalit Women's Writings

Questions and Observation

Directed to Dr. Sonalkar: How do we see the intersectionality of oppression and humiliation depicted in Dalit life narratives? Is there difference and how can we relate?

Dr. Sonalkar: I do agree with the multiple words used to depict the experiences faced by Dalit women. It does question the categories used in Dalit life narratives but it is used as a certain framework of analysis to read Dalit life narratives. This is the beginning, so instead of going into another debate we should continue to come with possible words to represent their experiences. Exploitation of labour and body do differ.

Dr. Rege, sufferings of pain and the categories used to define it is additive or intersectional that may be understood while reading the Afro-American Black women literatures.

Directed towards Dr. Rege: If Dalit life narratives are history, then who is constructing it and who receives it?

Dr. Rege: The writings on Dalit women indeed is a model of alternative history. Till 1990's these literatures were imagined as just narratives of sufferings and pain. It does construct an alternative history for themselves which is different from other society and particularly other mainstream women's history, for example; the work of Babythai Kamble is seen as "social history". Moreover, the traditional perspectives of looking caste from top-down in the academics, either through 'sanskritation' or Marxist paradigm of caste, Dalits never allowed scripting their history. However, breaking this traditional notion, Dalit life narratives has enabled to create their own history, moreover, there is no dominant history and every section of the community have their own history. Observation on the inclusion and

exclusion of narratives, one needs to include women from notified and de-notified tribes, Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians.

Emerging Issues

Comments

- Role of media in caste violence politics and importance of life stories.
- Dalit poetry in two lines gives the autobiography. Brahmins are said to have the sole right, other communities farming and writing; and Dalits would sing.
- Dalit women converted to Christianity and Islam are not allowed to enter temples and asked to re-convert. Even after conversion they do not get benefits of reservation.

Prof. Surinder S. Jodhka

Dalits are not general categories but marginal . When they convert to Christianity and Islam the Dalit- ness or Dalit identity erases but it breeds worse Consequences.